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UNCLAS HARARE 002336

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SUBJECT: PUBLIC OPINION POLL REVISITED

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1. This cable is to provide clarification on the comparison of the Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI) poll and the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) results as described in REFTEL. ZESN election results are based on official Zimbabwe Registrar General election results. ZESN is not an independent polling or survey organization. It is a coalition of thirty-eight non-governmental organizations formed to coordinate activities pertaining to elections. For the 2002 presidential election results, ZESN collected, compared, and synthesized media and government reports on election results and disseminated their findings to the public. No organization could do an independent assessment of the voting or voter rolls because the government never provided an NGO or opposition parties with voters rolls. ZESN might have been better able to provide an independent assessment had more people been accredited as domestic observers. Of the 12,500 names submitted, only 420 people were accredited.

2. In light of the source of ZESN electoral data, the fact that ZESN reported 43.1 percent of people voted for MDC and 56.9 percent voted for ZANU-PF is not surprising, does not reflect an independent assessment, and does not necessarily contradict MPOI survey results (30.5 percent MDC and 27.4 percent ZANU-PF).

3. Despite these shortcomings, the ZESN Zimbabwe Presidential Elections March 2002 report, released in April, does highlight some irregularities in the compilation of the voter rolls. The report cites a study conducted by Probe Market Research (PMR), an affiliate of Gallup International Poll Group, which suggested an over inflation of the number of possible people on the voters roll. According to PMR, a 100 percent voter registration would be 3.6 million names and not the 5.6 million claimed by the government. PMR claims that there could only have been 4.8 million potential voters in the country but given HIV/AIDS and economic migration from Zimbabwe, the total figure was likely lower. (Note: PMR referred to an anonymous 1997 study as the basis of its calculations. Using a methodology similar to that described by PMR and using U.S. Census Bureau population estimates, there would be more than 5.8 potential voters in the country versus the 4.8 PMR claims. A 100 percent voter registration, even against the backdrop of AIDS and economic migration, would also be more than PMR's estimates but not as high as the GOZs announced registrants numbers. End Note.)

4. A comparison of registered voters between 1995 and 2002 shows some interesting movements. The number of registered voters was smaller in Bulawayo in 2002 than 2000 while in the pro-ZANU-PF provinces registered voter populations increased by more than 40,000. From 1995 to 2002, Mashonaland Central and Midlands had increases in voter numbers of more than 100,000 people compared to 50,000 in Matebeleland, an MDC stronghold. Harare also had a sizeable increase in the number of registered voters between 2000 and 2002.

5. Comment: The Government of Zimbabwe's refusal to provide the voters roll to NGOs or the opposition parties makes any sort of independent post-election analysis difficult. While ZESN attempts to provide an independent assessment of the electoral process, it falls short because it was not provided with complete data. The ZESN report does have its merits in that it provides data on previous elections so that some comparisons are possible. End comment.

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